IEEE-USA Consultants Database Gets Major Upgrade

IEEE-USA has completed major upgrades to its Consultants Database! These upgrades are based on database members' input. And we believe the upgrade will improve the usefulness of the service and the user's experience.

The major new feature of this upgrade is making the member database profiles accessible to web crawlers like Google, and other search engines. The updated software will also now perform the following tasks:

- Update a consultant's web listing, when changes are made to the listing
- Make the e-mail links on the web-path page call a form that sends emails to the consultant, keeping the e-mails from being harvested for spam

Another upgrade is a feature that includes statistical collection of database member hits, per consultant. This feature will:

- record the number of times a consultant's listing is displayed as a table of contents link
- record the number of times a consultant's listing is displayed in full
- record the number of times the system runs a search
- collect monthly stats and save them, per consultant
- display the stats for a consultant in tabular form

Other upgraded features include adding the *reCAPTCHA* feature that will require a human being to submit all searches once the search criterion has been set. This feature will protect against data harvesting. And we've also improved some features on the "Assignment Posting" page that will give us greater control, to make sure only legitimate assignments are posted on the assignment page.

We believe these enhancements will increase the usage of this database by those seeking services from independent engineering consultants. We're hoping these new upgrades entice those consultants who've yet to become a member of our Consultants' Database to join. We're also hoping that members review their profile and make any necessary changes, so they can take advantage of these upgrades. The best news is that we have upgraded and increased functionality of the Consultants Database, but we are not increasing the annual subscription fee of $79. To subscribe go to the IEEE-USA website and click Consultant Services.

Tips To Optimize Your Profile

In addition to the upgrade, we've put together a list of tips to help Consultants Database members get better results from their database listing.

Tips to Optimize Your IEEE-USA Consultants Database Profile:

1. The effectiveness of your profile is closely linked to how well it performs on the Database's search engines. Using the best key words and phrases to describe your expertise is essential. Make sure those terms are the ones that prospective clients might use to find you (even if they're not the ones you'd deem most precisely descriptive of your technical practice).

2. It's useful to use the key terms more than once — and in more than one field — in your listing. For example, you can use the slogan field to repeat a key phrase. You might even give your consulting practice a name that would contain a key term or phrase.

3. Searches are case sensitive, so you might also want to use your key terms more than once in a field — once with initial caps, and once with all lower-case.

4. Make sure spelling and punctuation are correct and consistent with standard practice, and that there are no typos (for example, a missing space that would cause the search engine to run two words together).

5. Make sure to list your e-mail address. Many clients prefer to have initial contact via e-mail. If you're reluctant to publish your main e-mail address, consider setting up a Google gmail, or other free e-mail account, and use that for your Consultants Database e-mail address (but be sure to check it regularly, if you do).

Consider listing a website, and establishing one for your consulting practice, if you don't have one already. Doing so will allow potential clients to see more relevant information about you, and influence their decision to make an initial contact. If you do link to a Web site, be sure it is one used exclusively for your professional practice, and it doesn't contain non-professional content. If your listing has not been generating sufficient leads thus far, trying these tips, along with the new database upgrades, should provide an opportunity for you to increase your chances to land new business leads.

If anyone has questions about IEEE-USA's Consultants Database, or further questions regarding the new features, please send an email to **d.r.griffin@ieee.org**.

Using Social Media to Attract New Business

By John R. Platt

Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Blogger, Foursquare. So many social networks, so little time. What's a busy business owner or consultant to do? Which network is likely to bring in the most clients with new business?

Barbara Bix, managing principal at BB Marketing Plus of Newtonville, Mass., has the answers, based on more than a decade of helping companies leverage their online presence. Bix recently spoke to the IEEE Boston Section Consultants Network, and later discussed social media strategies with *The Institute*.

Why Social Media?

"The power of social media is that you stay at the top of the minds of people who care about you the most," Bix says. "You want people to follow you because you're a thought leader, you have a unique specialty, or they're your friends." Participating in social media networks keeps you in front of your friends, peers, and customers, so they think of you first when they have a problem that needs solving.

"You think people are thinking about you, but they're not unless they 'see' you often," Bix points out. And they need not only to know that you exist, she continues, "they also need to know every single thing you do, in case they're looking for someone to do that very thing. Updating your status in small, frequent doses on Twitter or Facebook is a great way to do that."

"You have to 'drip' on them," Bix says. "People are predisposed to reading quick drips, and your drips on social media sites are searchable. You need to be out there often, because otherwise no one will remember you."

Where do you start? Whether you're a job seeker, a working professional, or a consultant, the first place you need to be online is wherever your customers or peers are, Bix says.

To find that place, ask around. Find out what others in your industry are doing. Search the Internet for where discussions are taking place. Pick a person you know who is doing a good job in your industry, and start copying them. See which networks they use, how they use them, when they post, and how they reply to other people. Use that as a model. Then, as you get more comfortable, spread out and start doing your own thing.

Build Your Network

Before you start getting too involved on whichever social network you choose, make sure you have a good online presence and a network of people who know you. The best place to start that, according to Bix, is LinkedIn, a social media site dedicated to professional connections.

Join LinkedIn and create a professional profile that lists your skills and where you have worked. Then, build your network by linking to other professionals you know. "The people who know and love you are your best referral prospects," Bix says.

Every time you complete a project, update your LinkedIn status. "If you're not updating your LinkedIn status regularly, you're leaving money on the table," Bix says. "Be specific and state the value of what you did." For example, post something along the lines of: "I just helped a company reduce its costs by …"

She also recommends joining groups on LinkedIn where you can participate in discussions and answer questions that others post. That helps to show you as a thought leader in your field, and expose you to potential clients.

Become a Blogger, Too

The next thing you should do is decide whether to blog. There are many reasons why you should. "For one thing," Bix says, "it really boosts your search engine rankings. For another, writing about your industry and field makes you an instant expert whether you are or not.

"Keep the blog narrowly focused," Bix says, "and provide wise insights that will make your readers feel like you know your customers' needs."

How do you get people to read your blog? It's not a case of, "If you build it, they will come." You need to promote it. E-mail your friends and colleagues about it. Submit each entry to Digg, StumbleUpon, Reddit, and similar social bookmarking sites. Add a link to your blog on your LinkedIn profile, and include the link in your e-mail footer. Tweet about it (we'll get to that later). Meanwhile, create viable content that keeps readers coming back for more.

Even if you don't start your own blog, take some time to comment on others' blogs. Adding your input to what the authors post demonstrates your expertise.

You can create a free blog in minutes at Blogger, WordPress, and other services.

Twitter Strategies

To establish your presence on Twitter, use the search field on the Twitter home page to find people talking about your industry. For example, search for "microprocessors" or "IEEE." Once you find those people, follow them. If you read any updates that are relevant to what you do, repost them to your own followers, a process known as re-tweeting. Remember to add some words of your own.

Act like a curator, Bix suggests. Put some incisive commentary in front of the re-tweet. "You're adding value for your target audience and also continuing to show yourself as a leader. It also shows that you have an interest in what others are saying. For example, if people take the time to update their status, it's important to them, so comment on it," she says.

Facebook and Google

Facebook is a double-edged sword, Bix says, because "you can't control how others link to you. But it is where your closest relationships are. It wouldn't hurt for your sister to know what you do."

On the other hand, your professional connections might not be using Facebook, and your friends might not want to know about your profession. Make the call based on your industry, and where you're going to be seen the most, Bix advises.

It's important to know what people are talking about in your field, so Bix suggests setting up Google Alerts. The free service sends you links to news stories or blog posts based on the search terms you enter.

Another way to promote yourself is to review a popular book on Amazon. "Say something controversial," Bix advises. "The book will sell, and people will read and comment on your reviews."

For more advice, visit Bix's blog, The Top Line.

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ieee-usa today's engineer

Consulting 101

By Steven F. Barrett, PH.D., P.E.

Have you ever thought about performing consulting work? Or thought about starting your own consulting company? If you have, you're not alone, but there are several things you need to consider before becoming a consultant.

As an electrical engineer, your skills are in demand. Many companies and individuals require the design services and skill set of an electrical engineer, but do not have the resources or long-term requirement to add one to their permanent staff. Consulting engineers fill this need.

Serving as a consulting engineer has many benefits. Aside from the obvious financial incentive, serving as a consultant allows you to practice and refine your engineering and design skills. Also, consulting work may provide a much needed bridge between more permanent positions. This is especially important in the rapidly changing and challenging economic landscape we currently face. Furthermore, some engineers have relied on fulltime consulting work as their primary source of income.

Read the rest of the article in the November issue of IEEE-USA Today's Engineer at: http://www.todaysengineer.org/2010/Nov/consulting.asp
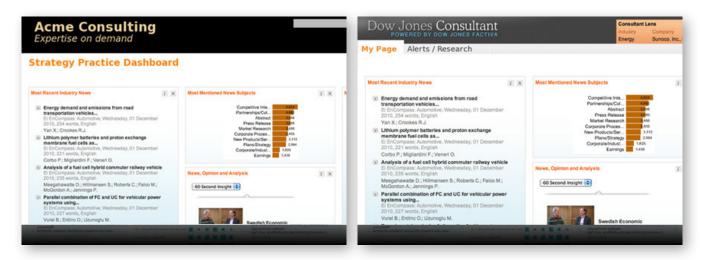
Get Interactive: New Issue of IEEE-USA in ACTION Available

The third issue of IEEE-USA's interactive online publication, *IEEE-USA in ACTION,* is now available online. Made possible by the U.S. dues assessment, this new publication is free to all IEEE members. *IEEE-USA in ACTION* is your source for learning about the programs, products, services and activities that IEEE-USA has to offer, and to find out what IEEE-USA is doing on behalf of U.S. IEEE members. View the new issue at: http://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/ieeeusa/ieeeusa_1010

Dow Jones Launches Website for Consultants

Dow Jones has created an online service geared toward consultants, aptly named "Dow Jones Consultant." The service will provide targeted news filtered from 28,000 specialized publications and 900 newswires, so consultants will have accurate information to identify opportunities, act on emerging trends, and help consultants demonstrate expertise to clients. In addition, Dow Jones plans to provide customized news via a newsletter, or integrate news into an existing application, intranet or mobile device.

The Dow Jones Consultants website gives no information as to whether this service can be geared toward engineering consultants. It also does not include any pricing information. But it may be a service that helps complement the engineering consulting news and information you already receive from your local networks and AICN.

2010 Profile of IEEE Consultants

IEEE-USA has released its *2010 Profile of IEEE Consultants*. This annual e-book has been hailed as a great resource for independent consultants — to help them decide how much to charge when they are preparing proposals, or negotiate contracts. Past readers have shared that they believe this publication helps them establish a fixed price or fee that is both competitive and fair, because the up-to-date data provides consultants with need-to-know information about what other consultants working in similar fields are charging. The data contained in this e-book comes from a national fee survey of IEEE members. This survey was conducted in the early summer of 2010, so the data is the most recent information you'll be able to find regarding consultants' fees. To purchase, go to: www.ieeeusa.org/communications/ebooks/.